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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted among deans of instruction in North Carolina community colleges and technical institutes and faculty members and students at Gaston College to determine the need for a study-technique course. Three questionnaires were constructed and distributed to the three groups. The questionnaires elicited information as to the need for such a course, the content of the course, course credit, instructors for the course, and whether the course should be required. Several personal interviews were also conducted to obtain additional information. The data collected showed that the consensus of the respondents was that such a course should be offered but not required and that credit should be given for the course. Gaston College faculty preferred counselors as instructors, whereas the students preferred English teachers. Suggestions most often made as to the course content were: taking notes, budgeting or allocating study time, reading skills, preparing for and taking examinations, writing papers, using the library, and vocabulary building. Two appendixes provide the questionnaire responses of the Gaston College faculty members and students. (DB)

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A PROPOSAL FOR A STUDY TECHNIQUE COURSE AT GASTON COLLEGE

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT MODULE

by

Dean H. Jones, M.A.

Gaston College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Since becoming a member of a community college faculty two years ago in the position of a counselor, the writer has encountered numerous students who have complained about not being prepared for the asperity of college study. Not only students but faculty members as well have voiced concern about students who appear helpless in the face of the supposively simple tasks of taking and organizing notes, underlining and outlining textbooks, preparing for and taking examinations, writing themes and reports, using the library, etc. These manifestations, plus additional manifestations to be discussed throughout the report, have convinced the writer that a separate course in study skills is a pressing need at Gaston College and community colleges in North Carolina and the entire United States. This practicum has been undertaken, therefore, for the purpose of arousing interest in and attempting to prove justification for the incorporation of a study technique course in the Gaston College curriculum.

Few college students know as much about studying as they need to know. College counselors and others have long realized that ineffective study is one of the most acute problems with which students must cope. Every student entering college for the first time, no matter how capable he thinks he is, has a great deal to learn about the art of studying. And effective studying definitely is an art.[1] One needs to learn how

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[1]Clifford T. Morgan and James Deese, How to Study (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1957), p. 1.

to study as much as one needs to learn how to repair an automobile or speak correct English. Proper study habits do not come naturally. There are efficient and skillful ways of studying and there are inefficacious ways of studying. Since effective study skills are not inborn, each college student, and particularly the community college student, needs to acquire as early as possible in the college experience study skills with which to succeed in the academic environment.

To freely welcome students into community colleges without preparing them to succeed is grossly unjust. The time has come for community colleges to cease looking upon their students as typical university students. The majority of community college students are not in this category. Community colleges cannot adopt a "sink or swim" attitude toward students. Educators in community colleges cannot assume that students will learn the art of studying by trial and error or common sense.

One of the reasons, the writer feels, that students make lower grades during their first college term is because they are struggling to learn how to study. Grades probably improve once these skills have been developed to some degree of proficiency.

Perhaps this study will show that sufficient interest exists on the Gaston College campus for such a course. Determining the existing need for a study technique course in the minds of Gaston College faculty and students is the primary aim of this practicum. If the investigation indicates that there is ample need for the course, then perhaps its adoption will be expedited.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Not long ago University of Rochester (N. Y.) freshmen were asked what they wished they had known before coming to college. Overwhelmingly, the most common answers were "how to study" and "how to organize study time."[2]

It has been reported by H. Chandler Elliot that seventy-five percent of classroom failure results from inadequate study and examination habits. Elliot maintains that we can no longer assume that instinct and common sense will enable students to succeed in the academic world.[3] Educators are beginning to realize that learning how to study should precede college work and that skill in study techniques can increase efficiency in scholastic endeavor.

Regular courses on how to study have been established in several colleges in the United States. One of the oldest and most successful of these programs is at Ohio State University. How to study training was given to fifty probation students but not to another matched group. Almost four years later fifty-eight percent of the trained group had maintained a passing grade average. Only eighteen percent of the control group did as well. Twenty percent of the trained group graduated from Ohio State University whereas none of the control group members graduated.[4]

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[2]Joyce Lain Kennedy, "Do You Know How To Study?", The Charlotte Observer, No date available.

[3]H. Chandler Elliot, The Effective Student (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), pp. vii-ix.

[4]Francis P. Robinson, Effective Study (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), pp. 1-3.

A study was conducted with students on probation at Stanford University. The study showed that the students gained in grade averages after a brief course in study methods. A matched control group not given the study technique course dropped in grade averages.[5]

In an experiment, it was discovered that monkeys increased their problem solving ability through practice. In essence, the monkeys learned how to learn. Perhaps the same technique may be applied to college students. Students probably can elevate their academic performance by learning and practicing sound learning principles.[6] As previously stated, effective study methods must be learned. It is far better that students learn these study techniques at the beginning of college than to struggle with unsound study methods throughout the college years.

Staton has compared learning how to study with learning how to swim. One may learn how to swim through natural methods but it is unlikely that the person could earn a position on a good college swimming team. A self-taught swimmer would probably have to unlearn many inept habits as well as develop many new tried and proven swimming techniques to successfully compete in college contests. Similarly, numerous students are forced to continue unsound and self-taught study habits without ever learning more effective study techniques which would enable them to succeed in stiff scholastic competition.[7]

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[5]Morgan and Deese, op. cit., p. 2.

[6]Max Meenes, Studying and Learning (New York: Random House, Inc., 1954), p. 3.

[7]Thomas Staton, R.S.V.P. - A Dynamic Approach to Study (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966), pp. 9-10.

George J. Dudycha has stated:

> An efficient worker, an efficient player or an efficient student is due to right habits firmly established. The secret of efficiency is correct habits firmly fixed.[8]

Certainly one of the gravest problems facing the community college today is the high dropout rate. Dr. John Roueche has remarked "that the open door has become the revolving door in the community college."[9] Statistics indicate that more than half of the students who enter community colleges never finish the first year. Only about twenty percent continue to earn a four-year degree. About one-third to one-half of community college students require some kind of remedial study. Community college students need assistance in learning to express themselves, in reading improvement, in vocabularly building and simply in learning how to study.[10]

Through its remedial program, Gaston College is striving to combat the dropout problem. Gaston College offers Math 81 - 82 (equivalent to the first year of high school algebra), English 090 and Reading Improvement 090. Credits earned from these courses cannot be counted toward a degree. These are extremely helpful courses for students lacking basic skills and are suggested for students who score low on the American College Tests. A segment of the reading improvement courses (there is also a Reading Improvement 101 course) deals with study techniques.

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[8] George J. Dudycha, Learn More with Less Effort (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1957), p. 3.

[9] Opinion expressed by Dr. John Roueche in a lecture at Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, North Carolina, January 26, 1974.

[10] Gerald M. Know, "Is a Community College Right for Your Child?", Better Homes and Gardens (September, 1973), pp. 20-30.

Since only a certain percentage of Gaston College students take the courses in reading improvement, most students never have an opportunity to receive formal instruction in study skills.

Community colleges in particular should offer instruction in study techniques because of the practice of open admissions. This egalitarian concept means essentially that every youth is entitled to a try at college. As a result of this educational concept, many students enter community colleges with serious academic problems, such as poor high school grades, that create uncertainty and doubt for them about being successful in college.[11] At least some of the doubt and uncertainty which students have could be erased if they were taught effectual study techniques shortly after entering college.

In an interview published in a recent issue of College Management, President Lawrence R. Winchell, Jr. of Atlantic Community College, New Jersey, reportedly stated:

> If we are going to let everybody in, we are going to have to provide the facilities and capabilities to meet a multiplicity of needs. We have to have the kinds of programs that will keep them here and offer avenues of education which lead to success for the students.[12]

Community colleges must design programs of preventive intervention to enable students to succeed in academic pursuits. A beginning point for community colleges might be the recognition that transition from

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[11]Herman Schuchman, "Special Tasks of Commuter Students," The Personnel and Guidance Journal, Vol. 52 (March, 1974), p. 466.

[12]Lawrence R. Winchell, Jr., "Interview with a Community College President," College Management, Vol. 9 (January, 1974), p. 25.

high school to college is a traumatic experience for many students, particularly for the so-called new or nontraditional students. Programs designed to lessen the casualties of this period could include courses in study methods.

"Prevention is better than cure" is an old proverb. Programs must be developed in the community college that will help prevent student academic failure. A student castaway is another burden cast upon an already burdened society. The community college was partly established to help rescue the academically perishing and to care for the academically deprived. It must vigilently guard against becoming just another educational institution for the socially and academically elite. The soul of any educational institution is the student. The community college must care for and nourish its soul. Every feasible program must be developed to assure the success of the community college student. A study technique course may be just a small step in that direction.

PROCEDURES

In conducting the study, three questionnaires were constructed for the purpose of gathering specific data from three groups of people. One questionnaire was designed for the deans of instruction of the fifty-six community colleges and technical institutes in North Carolina. A questionnaire was mailed to all of the deans for their responses. The following questions were on the questionnaire:

1. Does your institution offer a separate course in study techniques? (Involving contents such as the wise use of study time, getting the most out of textbooks, taking notes and preparing for and taking examinations.)

2. If your institution does not offer a separate course in study techniques, do you see a need for such a course? Please state your reasons for or against.

3. If study techniques are included in other courses on your campus (such as reading improvement), please list the courses.

4. If your school offers a separate course in study techniques, please describe its contents.

A second questionnaire was designed for faculty members in the degree programs at Gaston College. Every faculty member in this category at Gaston College had access to a questionnaire. The following five questions were on the questionnaire:

1. Should Gaston College include in its curriculum a separate course in study skills? Please state your reasons for or against. (If your answer to this question is affirmative, please complete the remaining questions.)

2. What should be included in the course contents?

3. Should the course be required? If required, for whom?

4. How much credit, if any, should the course have?

5. Who should teach the course?

A third questionnaire was formulated for both freshmen and sophomore students at Gaston College. Questionnaires were distributed to only a certain number of students. Only those students willing to complete a questionnaire were given one. The student questionnaire contained the identical questions as the faculty questionnaire.

In addition to the information collected from the questionnaire, the writer discussed with colleagues and students in more detail the

pros and cons regarding a study technique course at Gaston College. These informal discussions proved to be invaluable. Questions and problems arose from these discussions which were not considered when the writer first proposed the study.

A careful review of related literature also proved to be considerably significant in the formulation of this practicum. The writer was surprised to find in the Gaston College Learning Resources Center so many articles and books relating to study skills and methods. Without the benefit of the related literature, this practicum would have been incomplete.

The rationale behind the procedures employed in this study was to determine the opinions and feelings of those most affected by a study technique course, namely, deans of instruction, faculty and students. It would be quite asinine for a college to adopt a new course which students did not want to take or faculty members did not deem useful. Many courses have been adopted in the past when there was not sufficient need for them. The adage "look before you leap" perhaps best describes the rationale behind the procedures utilized in this study.

RESULTS

In the practicum proposal the writer stated: "It is expected that the study will demonstrate that sufficient demands exists among students and faculty for a study technique course at Gaston College and that it should be included in the curriculum." The results of the investigation corroborate this expectation.

Responses of Deans of Instruction

Although not necessarily related to the study at Gaston College, the writer felt that it would be beneficial to learn what other North Carolina community colleges and technical institutes were doing regarding instruction in study skills. Regretfully, only twenty-one deans of instruction returned a completed questionnaire. Only three of these institutions are currently offering a separate course in study techniques. The three schools are Guilford Technical Institute in Jamestown, Wayne Community College in Goldsboro and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute in Lenoir. It should be noted that this statistic does not include those institutions which have programmed materials dealing with study methods. Several schools indicated that self-instructional units in study techniques are available to students in their learning laboratories.

Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute failed to include any information regarding the contents of its course in study skills. Wayne Community College reported only that its study technique course contains components such as the utilization of study time, the wise use of textbooks, taking notes, and preparing for examinations.

Guilford Technical Institute entitles its course "Study Skills" (Soc. 101) and grants two credit hours for its successful completion. The course attempts to develop skills in techniques for improving study behavior. Stress is placed on notetaking, remembering, listening, reading, writing reports, preparing for examinations, taking examinations, planning study time and achieving academic success. The course at Guilford Technical Institute is designed to enable the student to fulfill the ensuing goals:

1. Heighten the student's ability to get more from classroom lectures by learning more effective ways to listen, take notes and remember.

2. Heighten the student's general reading ability by adopting systematic procedures for reading.

3. Heighten the student's ability to read, understand and remember textbook reading assignments by using the SQ3R method.

4. Heighten the student's ability to write more effective short essays and term papers.

5. Heighten the student's ability to increase scores on both subjective and objective examinations.

A total of seventeen deans indicated that there is definitely a need for study technique courses in community colleges and technical institutes. The Dean of Instruction at Durham Technical Institute stated:

> Most of the students we get do not know how to study. We hope to put in a course for all freshmen in the fall of 1975 entitled 'Study Skills'. It will be comprehensive in scope, and we hope give them the foundation they need.

From Western Piedmont Community College came this response from the Dean of Instruction:

> A study technique course is definitely needed. My reasons for this are: 1) students are aware of their needs since approximately three-fourths of them indicated a need for help in study skills on our entrance test in 1970, 2) the students' oral opinions, 3) students' achievement levels in classes where study skills are taught, and 4) teachers' observations.

The Dean of Instruction at Haywood Technical Institute made this comment:

> Many of our students cannot read and comprehend to a level necessary to attain success in their programs. They have never really been taught how to study.

Finally, the Dean of Instruction at Randolph Technical Institute explained:

> For whatever reasons, most entering freshmen have little concept on how to effectively study. Most academic problems are eventually traced to the inability of the student to take class notes and how to study to get the most for the time expended.

Although four deans of instruction opposed a separate course in study skills, three of the four favored these techniques being incorporated in other courses. These deans favored offering study skills as a part of such courses as reading improvement or the beginning course in English.

Eight of the twenty-one schools which correspond with the writer do not have a course or courses in which study skills are taught. Courses in the twelve institutions in which study skills occupy an integral part are: reading improvement and vocabularly building (Guilford Tech), occupational and educational planning (Wilson Tech), reading comprehension (Asheville-Buncombe Tech), communication skills (Bladen Tech), and reading improvement (a course offered in several institutions). Other courses with almost identical titles are omitted here.

Summarizing the cardinal points of this segment of the study, only three of the twenty-one North Carolina community colleges and technical institutes included in this survey offer a separate course in study methods. Seventeen deans of instruction advocated a distinct course in study skills. Only one dean voiced opposition to any formal instruction in study techniques. Twelve institutions presently teach study skills as a part of other courses.

Responses of Gaston College Faculty

Number of faculty members who participated in the study. A total of forty faculty members in degree programs at Gaston College completed a questionnaire. The largest number of responses was from languages and literature instructors, with nine instructors participating. The fewest number of responses was from math and social science instructors, each with only two instructors participating.

Number of faculty members who favored a study technique course. Thirty faculty members supported a separate course in study skills at Gaston College. Seven out of nine languages and literature instructors and five out of six business instructors responded affirmatively to the proposal for the course's adoption. All but one counselor supported the course. Administrators were evenly divided with three for and three against. All of the science, technology and social science instructors completing a questionnaire favored a study technique course at Gaston College.

The thirty faculty members who advocated a study technique course at Gaston College cited several reasons for this opinion:

1. Open admissions enables many students to matriculate who are unprepared for college study.
2. High schools do not adequately prepare students for college work.
3. A study technique course would instill confidence in students.
4. A study technique course would lower the dropout rate.

The ten faculty members who opposed a study technique course at Gaston College presented several arguments:

1. It is impossible to teach people how to study.

2. Students who are college material will find out on their own how to study.

3. Study techniques should be stressed by each instructor at the beginning of every course.

4. Gaston College already has a course in which study skills are taught. (Reading Improvement 101)

Number of faculty members who believed the course should be required. Fourteen faculty members believed that the course, if incorporated in the curriculum, should be required. Of the fourteen, only half maintained that the course should be required for all degree program students. The other seven faculty members suggested that it should be required only for those students who are on academic probation or score low on the American College Tests. Most faculty members were opposed to a required course in study skills. They argued that a worthy course will continue on its own merits.

Data concerning course credit. Of the thirty members of the faculty who supported a study technique course, eight did not believe that it should have any credit. Ten faculty members recommended that the course should receive only one credit. Four faculty members suggested that it be a three credit course. One instructor advocated two credits, another five credits and the other six faculty members had no opinion with regard to course credit.

Data concerning course instructor. Thirteen of the thirty faculty members who advocated a study technique course had no opinion concerning who should teach the course. Counselors were most frequently mentioned as possible instructors for the course. Counselors were mentioned six times. A team teaching approach was cited four times. Three faculty members favored a psychology instructor for the course. Two faculty members suggested a reading specialist, one an English instructor and another preferred a member of the General Studies faculty.

Data concerning course contents. Concerning contents to be explored in a study technique course, in descending order of the most frequently mentioned, faculty members listed the following topics:

1. Reading skills.
2. Budgeting or allocating study time.
3. Taking notes.
4. Using the library.
5. Writing papers.
6. Preparing for and taking examinations.

A recapitulation of the results of the faculty survey is recorded in Appendix A.

Responses of Gaston College Students

Number of students who participated in the study. Sixty Gaston College students were asked to participate in the study. Thirty freshmen and thirty sophomores were randomly selected to complete a questionnaire. No effort was made to limit the study to students in particular programs of study although all of the students were enrolled in degree studies.

Number of students who favored a study technique course. Overwhelmingly, students supported a study skills course for Gaston College. Whereas thirty of the forty faculty members believed the course is needed, fifty-six of the sixty students believed the course would be beneficial. Students gave several reasons for supporting a study technique course:

1. It would aid students who have not learned basic study skills in high school.

2. It would help students adjust to the speed at which college studies are covered.

3. It would improve student motivation and grades.

4. It would help students unlearn ineffective study habits adopted in the past.

Two freshmen and two sophomores argued that a study method course would be almost valueless. They maintained that students who want to do well in college will develop the necessary study skills to do so. Moreover, the four students stated that study techniques vary with individual instructors and courses, thus they questioned the applicability of one course for so many different situations.

Number of students who believed the course should be required. Gaston College students were opposed to the course being required. Only twelve students, five freshmen and seven sophomores, felt that a study technique course should be required. The general consensus of those opposed to a required course is that far too many courses are already "crammed down people's throats."

Data concerning course credit. It was overwhelmingly recommended by the students that a study skills course should receive three credit hours. Thirty of the fifty-six students advocated this much credit. Seven students felt that no credit should be granted, six students supported one credit, six students favored five credits and seven students had no opinion.

Data concerning course instructor. With regard to an instructor for the course, most students believed an English instructor would be best suited for this role. Counselors placed second as the most desirable instructors for the course. Interestingly, several students recommended experienced sophomores as possible instructors.

Data concerning course contents. Regarding topics to be treated in a study technique course, in descending order of the most frequently mentioned, students listed the following topics:

1. Taking notes.
2. Budgeting or allocating study time.
3. Reading skills.
4. Preparing for and taking examinations.
5. Writing papers.
6. Vocabulary building.
7. Using the library.

There was no significant difference between freshmen and sophomores with regard to course contents. Appendix B summarizes the pertinent data collected from Gaston College students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this investigation, the writer respectfully makes the following suggestions with regard to a study technique course at Gaston College.

An experimental course in study skills should be established and a comparative study performed with experimental and control groups. This is a proven methodology in validating the efficacy of proposed courses. If the experiment proves the course worthy, and it is established on a permanent basis, the subsequent suggestions should be considered.

Firstly, students should not be required to take the course. Results of the study showed conclusively that both faculty and students reject the idea of a study technique course being required. This recommendation is in keeping with the trend toward "open education" in colleges and universities. Required courses are being eliminated in colleges throughout the country. Students usually learn more in courses which they have selected.[13] In a personal interview with Dr. George McSwain, Dean of Instruction at Gaston College, he said: "Students should be attracted to and not trapped by courses."[14] Counselors and faculty advisers should, however, make it a point to recommend this course to students on probation or with learning disabilities. Beginning freshmen could also be greatly helped by the course.

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[13]Opinion expressed by Dr. John Roueche in a lecture at Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, North Carolina, March 23, 1974.

[14]Statement by Dr. George McSwain, personal interview, March 21, 1974.

Secondly, three credit hours seem appropriate for a study technique course. These credits should be counted toward graduation requirements at Gaston College. An obvious defect in this recommendation has to do with the transferability of the course to senior institutions. It is hoped that the course could be transferred as an elective.

Thirdly, although contrary to the opinions expressed by many faculty members and students, the writer strongly supports an instructional team approach to a study technique course. An instructional team brings to students specialists in reading, foreign languages, math, sciences and social sciences. Such differentiated instructional competence provides for teaching in greater scope.[15] One team member, with no particular specialist in mind, could be designated as the team leader or coordinator. Such a person, in collaboration with the other team members, would be responsible for determining course contents, scheduling instructors, evaluating students and handling related responsibilities. A team teaching approach acknowledges the improbability of one instructor being competent in the diverse content areas essential to a comprehensive study technique course.

Finally, a community college study technique course should include at least the ensuing contents:

1. Taking notes.
2. Budgeting or allocating study time.
3. Reading skills.
4. Preparing for and taking examinations.

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[15] J. Minor Gwynn, Theory and Practice of Supervision (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1969), pp. 429-430.

5. Writing papers.

6. Using the library.

7. Vocabulary building.

8. Specialized areas such as studying foreign languages, mathematics and sciences.

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APPENDIX A

Responses of Faculty Members of Degree Programs at Gaston College
to a Questionnaire Regarding a Proposed
Study Technique Course

Participants	Number Responding to Questionnaire	Number Supporting Course	Number Advocating that the Course be Required	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Credit	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Instructor	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Contents
Administrators	6	3	1	1, 3 or 5 credits (tied)	No opinion	Taking notes
Counselors	4	3	1	1 credit	Reading Instructor or Counselor (tied)	Taking notes, Reading skills, Budgeting study time or using library (tied)
Social Science Instructors	2	2	2	1 or 2 credits (tied)	Counselor or General Studies Instructor (tied)	Reading skills
Languages & Literature Instructors	9	7	4	1 credit or no opinion (tied)	Team Teaching, Counselors or no opinion (tied)	Reading skills and Taking notes (tied)
Math Instructors	2	1	1	No credit	No opinion	Following directions

APPENDIX A (continued)

Participants	Number Responding to Questionnaire	Number Supporting Course	Number Advocating that the Course be Required	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Credit	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Instructor	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Contents
Science Instructors	3	3	1	1 credit	Counselor or No opinion (tied)	Budgeting study time
Business Instructors	6	5	1	No credit or 3 credits (tied)	Counselor	Reading skills
Technology Instructors	3	2	2	No credit	Team Teaching	Reading skills
Others	5	4	1	No opinion	Reading Instructor, Psychology Instructor, or Counselor (tied)	Budgeting study time

APPENDIX B

Responses of Students at Gaston College to a Questionnaire Regarding a Proposed Study Technique Course

Participants	Number Responding to Questionnaire	Number Supporting Course	Number Advocating that the Course be Required	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Credit	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Instructor	Most Frequently Mentioned Course Contents
Freshmen	30	28	5	3 credits	English Instructors	How to take notes and Budgeting study time
Sophomores	30	28	7	3 credits	English Instructors	How to take notes and Budgeting study time

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